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# "Corruption in/of Cinema"

Conference Report: 27<sup>th</sup> SERCIA Conference. Conference organized by Caroline Lardy and Christophe Gelly. Université Clermont-Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand, France, September 7-9 2022

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- 1 In September 2022, SERCIA (Société d'Etudes et de Recherche sur le Cinéma Anglophone), a society founded in 1993 to gather researchers in the field of English-speaking cinema, held its 27th conference at Université Clermont Auvergne in Clermont-Ferrand, France. Organized by Christophe Gelly and Caroline Lardy and hosted by the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (MSH Clermont-Ferrand), the conference included 12 panels in which researchers coming from a wide variety of locations (France, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States, Sweden, and many more) presented their work on English-speaking cinema and television. The event also included two keynote conferences, delivered by Martine Beugnet (Paris Diderot University) and Tricia Jenkins (Texas Christian University).
- 2 The conference theme, corruption, was shown to be a highly productive concept when applied to the study of cinema and television. Encompassing notions of physical decay, moral degradation, socio-economic crisis and/or perversion of an original state of purity, corruption was tackled by speakers from a wide variety of perspectives. Some approached it as a thematic concern, engaging with how the topic of corruption is represented in specific films, with an emphasis on the body as a corrupted presence in certain generic frameworks. Genre, and the productive possibilities of "corrupting" its pre-conceived codes, equally emerged as a central concern for many of the speakers. Complementary to this approach were papers focusing on the corruption of film form, and on how aesthetic and material corruption can lead to a different relation between cinema and reality. The purity of film as medium was, in effect, a recurring concern across panels, with discussions on the advent of digital technology and its potentially corruptive influence. Finally, the role of corruption within the making and distribution of films was closely analyzed, through a series of papers questioning the relationships between political power and the entertainment business.

- 3 Panel 1, "Corruption and Genre [1]", offered a wide view of the film genres that represent corruption, sometimes becoming themselves places of corruption. Cristelle Maury (Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès) dedicated her talk to Debra Granik's *Winter's Bone* (2010). In this independent movie focusing on a teenager taking care of her younger siblings after their parents abandoned them, Maury explored the way the film noir conventions are distorted, leading to a reshuffling of the border between domesticity and a threatening outside world. With its plot centered on the moral corruption of a rural community, the hermeneutic quest of a pure, innocent character seems to be challenged by an interpenetration of domesticity and the investigation at the center of the plot. Conjuring up both classic Hollywood and modern European cinema, Maury eventually showed that the cross-fertilization of feminist theory and filmmaking leads to a new vision of the feminine in the noir genre, making domesticity a question of survival and an act of heroism. The female protagonist of Sergio Leone's 1968 *Once Upon a Time in the West* also challenges generic conventions, according to Isabelle Schmitt-Pitiot (Université de Bourgogne-Franche Comté, Dijon). Taking her lead from Philippe Ortolí's concept of "interfering plots", Schmitt-Pitiot extended the notion of interference to the natural elements present in Leone's film, particularly water and fire. Breaking away from the idea of the Italian western as a corruptor of the classic western – the purity of which is highly questionable –, her talk put forth how this clash of elements manages to inscribe the failure of the represented system at its very heart, disclosing a corrupt universe that oppresses everyone starting with women. Taking the western back to its US roots, Ethan and Joel Coen's 2018 Netflix film *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* was the core focus of Julie Assouly's talk (Université d'Artois) about anthology films, alongside Wes Anderson's *The French Dispatch* (2021). Assouly started from these two recent releases to disambiguate the very notion of anthology and suggest a both historical and semantic approach to the anthology genre and its various forms, from the horror portmanteau that flourished in the 1970s to Robert Altman's hyperlink films, not to forget the sketches comedy such as Dino Risi's *Monsters* (1963) or, more recently, Damián Szifron's *Relatos Salvajes* (2014). It eventually appeared that the contemporary anthology is often an instance of the omnibus film, that is, a series of more or related skits all directed by a unique director (or, in the Coen's case, two), stressing a unique author-ity and a form of self-reflexivity. Sven Weidner's (Universität Bamberg) talk aimed to present a different view on the Coen brothers' work and its "postmodern cosmos".
- 4 In Panel 2, "Corruption and Society [1]," the widespread understanding of corruption as an entirely negative concept was contested by three papers focusing on its productive and creative possibilities. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's notion of the "aura," Argýrios Keleris (Université Paris-8) argued for the potential of certain texts— corrupted in both material and aesthetic ways—to recreate the auratic object, meant to be lost in the process of mass media reproduction. He focused on Todd Haynes' *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* (1987), as a film that holds corruption as a thematic and aesthetic concern (it features disfigured, Barbie-like dolls to encapsulate the protagonist fight with anorexia), but which has also been subject to material corruption, degeneration and loss over the years. In a different generic context, Yann Roblou (Université Polytechnique Hauts de France, Valenciennes) approached Ti West's *X* (2022) as a film that engages with corruption in various ways. It uses the moral dichotomy of corruption-virtue and bodily corruption to reflect on the sociopolitical context of the film, that of the backlash of the 1970s and the rise of Evangelical conservatism in the

US. Crucially, it also "corrupts" the slasher genre by revisiting it from a feminist perspective, thus proposing a positive dimension of corruption-as-hybridity, in how it leads to original products. Finally, Vincent Jaunas (The American University of Paris) explored the ambivalent role of corruption in the films of M. Night Shyamalan's. He argued that corruption was both a thematic interest in Shyamalan's films and key to his aesthetic approach, interpreting his borrowings from popular forms and his preference for the final twist as "corrupt" devices. Shifting to an ethical level, however, he questioned the discourse that Shyamalan's films put forward: while they promote the need to accept physical and moral corruption as part of life, they problematically situate corruption as a gateway to greatness.

- 5 Panel 3, "Corruption and Horror," offered different takes on corruption within the horror genre. Echoing the previous panel, Julia Echeverría (Universidad de Zaragoza) engaged with the ambivalent nature of corruption in her reading of the zombie horror film *The Girl with All the Gifts* (Colm McCarthy, 2016). Through an intersectional approach attentive to the subversion of the zombie narrative tradition, she argued that the film portrays humanity as corrupted and in need of regeneration, thus unsettling and transgressing the boundaries between the human and the non-human, normalcy and corruption. Mikaël Toulza (Université de Lille) also explored the subversion of a horror tradition, that of Louisiana voodoo films, in his analysis of *Eve's Bayou* (Kasi Lemmons, 1997). He argued that the film, in its unsensationalistic representation of the priestess and the rites of the voodoo religions, aims to provoke a negotiation of formerly corrupted representations of Louisiana voodoo that has been taken up by later works (i.e. Beyoncé visual album *Lemonade*). Gilles Menegaldo (Université de Poitiers) explored the representations of monstrous bodies through a comparison between two key films of the body-horror canon, *The Thing* (John Carpenter, 1982) and *The Fly* (David Cronenberg, 1986). Through an examination of the visual and sonic figurations of mutations and their effect on spectators, he argued that while the former locates corruption as an external, more spectacular process, the latter features it as internal, thus fostering a dialogue between the human and the monster within the body of the mutant. Pablo Gómez (Universidad de Zaragoza) examined a different kind of corruption increasingly represented in the genre, that of humans hunting other humans. By looking at the ideological and logistical operations of this practice, he analyzed *Bacurau* (Mendonça Filho and Dornelles, 2019) as exemplary of how human hunting narratives raise transnational concerns over the ability of global elites to bend local legislation, engage in corrupt practices across borders and mold foreign spaces.
- 6 The variety of actors and places of corruption and their on-screen representation depending on the cinematic genres, seemed to be a common focus of the talks in Panel 4, "Corruption and Society". Raphaëlle Costa de Beaugard (Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès) opened with a study of Stanley Kubrick's 1956 film *The Killing*, analyzing the tension between a corrupting capitalist system and an incorruptible time. First presenting Kubrick's work as a cinema of the brain, she stressed the link between corruption and gambling, and the way it leads the film to display a narrative form of corruption. The focus was then narrowed onto the formal corruption of the film, from the way it mingles fictional and documentary images to its disjunct editing inviting the viewer to rearrange time – an attempt at corrupting time and chronology that is eventually proven vain, for time seems to be the only force untouched by corruption. Such incorruptibility is certainly not a value shared by the characters of Ernst Lubitsch's *Ninotchka* (1939) and *Cluny Brown* (1946), which shared the focus of

Dominique Sipièrè's (Université Paris-Nanterre) presentation about the joys of corruption. Sipièrè himself described his talk as a light-hearted interlude, which seemingly reflects his stressing of how seducing corruption can appear in Lubitsch's work. Whether it be as bribery, playful language or frivolity, corruption almost appears as a synonym for culture, that guides the characters through a quest for the truth of desire – which, according to Sipièrè, places Lubitsch closer to Voltaire than Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet. Such a productive, yet less frivolous vision of corruption, was also at stake in Celestino Deleyto and Marimar Azcona's (Universidad de Zaragoza) presentation, focusing on Tom McCarthy's 2021 *Stillwater* and the Hollywood-Marseilles encounter it presents us with. Describing the film as a hybrid between the mainstream and the political entertainment, Deleyto paralleled the flipside *persona* of actor Matt Damon with the way McCarthy's film allows for the emergence of a renewed vision of hybrid urbanism – in opposition to the mass media's caricatural association of Marseilles' multiculturalism with violence and insecurity. Another city was at the core of the last talk of the panel, in which Marine Soubeille (Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3) delivered a study of the representation of a dying American Dream in the TV series *Dallas* (1978-91, CBS). Showing how the traditional American values are challenged by both moral and political corruption, Soubeille conjured up the notion of "loss of integrity" coined by Samuel Johnson and analyzed the way the character of JR epitomizes postmodern individualism against the old, reassuring ranching model. Listing the political and economic crises that punctuated the 1970s, the intervention eventually put forth the societal crisis embodied by the questioning of the feminine status in the patriarchal world of both the series and the 1980s' United States. *Dallas* – both the city and the show – are, according to Soubeille, the epitome of a modern dream of individual success that is either corrupt already or bound to degenerate.

- 7 The first keynote speech of the conference, "A Mediaology of Productive Corruption", was given by Martine Beugnet (Université Paris Diderot). Beugnet offered a reflection on the aesthetics of corrupt filmic matter. The talk opened with a reference to Kenneth Anger's written work, notably the 1975 *Hollywood Babylon* and its exploration of the darkest sides of the US City of Dreams. Anger's writing, according to Beugnet, operates a fusion of form and content, which draws its aesthetic strength from the human fascination for the corrupt. Recalling Aristotle's definition of corruption as a dynamic process, her study then focused on the film as material as well as on its effects on the screened image, redefining corrupt film as a zombified body for which decomposition is but a step towards resurrection. In that regard, film is an inherently nostalgic medium, that foreshadows its future material alteration as soon as its first exhibition – hence, the pulse of materialist cinema towards a deliberate corruption of images. Beugnet then moved on to a study of this inherent corruption as applied to contemporary digital images. Although this technological shift may have been thought to rid the film medium from the risk of corruption, the digital actually brought to the medium a new form of impurity, with for instance glitches and data motion. Nicolas Provost's 2010 video essay *Long Live the New Flesh* was used as an example to illustrate this new corruption, before Beugnet suggested focusing on the persistence in nowadays cinema of corruption as a key element of plot and characterization. The more mainstream example of Craig Gillespie's 2017 *I, Tonya* was then put to the fore, for its representation of figure skating actually draws a parallel between the athletic discipline and filmmaking itself: both are hybrid spectacles, which is another proof of the impossibility of an uncorrupt cinema. Far from leading to a pessimistic statement on

the future of images, this led to Beugnet's concluding that instead of choosing between the destructive and the transformative aspects of corruption, the film medium had to embrace it as a whole, in all its creative and recreative dimensions.

- 8 Presentations in Panel 5, "Corruption and the Filmic Form [1]," explored different forms of corruption of the film image. Janica Tomić (University of Zagreb) analyzed the use of the *tableau vivant* in cinema, a residue of painting and theater often thought to corrupt the purity of cinema as an independent art. Drawing on the films of Roy Andersson, Peter Greenaway and especially Lars von Trier, she contested this view by showing how the form can itself be corrupted—by over-aestheticizing it, by making it intermedial—and thus function for a whole variety of purposes. Patrick Adamson (Independent scholar) equally subverted pre-conceived notions of corruption, this time by looking at the repurposing of archival footage in the comic British TV series *Fractured Flickers* (1963 -4, Desilu Studios). While the series was heavily criticized at the time for corrupting the silent films it re-edited and dubbed, Adamson argued that it rendered these recycled images at once familiar and unfamiliar, inviting irreverent metacinematic engagements with the first decades of US-American filmmaking that put many forgotten, inaccessible films back in circulation. Finally, Sébastien Lefait (Aix-Marseille University) offered novel insights into the relationship between cinema and reality by focusing on the growing presence of surveillance footage in fiction films. Focusing on the films of Andrew Niccol, he argued that the inclusion of surveillance images often renders the real in film more unstable; crucially, this affects the construction of visibility in cinema by offering a more decentered gaze, in which seeing and being seen go hand-in-hand.
- 9 Panel 6, "Bodies and Corruption", explored the way the bodies are tested, objectified, reproduced and/or duplicated. Guilhem Billaudel (Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3) opened the panel with a discussion of the way bodies are represented as both corrupting and corruptible entities in space travel movies. Through the examples of a USA blockbuster (*The Martian*, Ridley Scott, 2015) and a European art film (*High Life*, Claire Denis, 2018), the talk focused on the way bodies, as strange, impure elements, alter the space and spaces they explore when leaving Earth. Conversely, the study also analyzed how these same human bodies are tested by their outer space encounters, whether it be in a destructive or creative way. Drawing from JP Telotte's notion of the body-image, Billaudel's presentation attempted to show how this bodily corruption extends to the images of the films themselves, making the space travel film an inherently corrupt entity. If bodies can be turned into images, they can also be made sheer copies of themselves, as illustrated by Pablo Cabeza-Macuso's (Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3) study of the doubling of television characters in shows like *Doctor Who* (2005-, BBC) and *Angel* (1999-2004, The WB). Relying on Didi Huberman's work on the disappearing Ninfa and its reduction to a hollow piece of cloth, the talk shed light on the transformation of individuals into matter by an oppressive higher power. Strong links were made between the costume-identity of deindividualized characters and the social status of the fictional figures at stake, putting forth how the original characters of these works are all bound to become rags or waste. The fall of the human figure was eventually compared to a form of deterritorialization. Human bodies as matter-to-be were also, to some extent, at the core of Jocelyn Dupont's (Université de Perpignan) analysis of the film adaptations of Oscar Wilde's *Portrait of Dorian Gray* (1890), from Albert Lewin's classic (1945) to Oliver Parker's 2009 work. Based partly on Shannon Wells-Lassagne's work on the persisting motifs of erosion and degeneration in

Victorian literature, Dupont's talk aimed at exploring the transient aspect of corruption, as well as its inherence to culture as depicted in both Wilde, Lewin and Parker's work. The talk focused quite notably on Parker's view of Dorian Gray's perversion and its assimilation to a form of harmless eroticism, the representation of which seems to be itself corrupted by a post-MTV imagery that paradoxically seems to be more puritan than the original text.

- 10 The second keynote conference was given by Tricia Jenkins (Texas Christian University) and approached corruption as an issue within the making and distribution of films. Entitled "Hollywood, Corruption, and the State", Jenkins's talk addressed the potentially corrupt nature of what she calls the "the U.S. government - entertainment complex". Through the example of the Department of Defense, the conference first provided an outline of how the complex works. For a variety of reasons—to increase levels of recruitment, educate the public, increase congressional budgets, whitewash history, advance certain agendas and policies—government agencies like the DOD trade access to locations or expensive equipment (tanks, aircrafts carriers, pilots) for script changes. The State has what Hollywood wants, which is access to expensive material, while Hollywood has what the State needs: an ability to shape the perception of millions of viewers. Although acknowledging a useful dimension to this complex, Jenkins argued that the relationship is corrupt in two ways. First, it corrupts the truth of some of the films carried out under the influence of the State, either by omission (denying or silencing the negative effects of military service, for example) or by altering proven historical facts. Second, the practice itself is corrupt, as it implies accepting favors or bribes (in the form of cheap equipment) in exchange for favorable images of the State. The talk concluded by questioning whether the complex, inasmuch as it restricts the right to free speech of filmmakers, might actually violate constitutional law.
- 11 The essence of film as medium and its relationship to reality was a central concern in Panel 7, "Corruption and the Filmic Form [2]," which expanded the discussion on the corruption of film form. Germán Duarte (Free University of Bozen-Bolzano) addressed how digital technology, because of its ability to generate images that do not presuppose the existence of an object, corrupted our perception of reality and of film as medium. In this context, he analyzed documentary films—in particular the work of Peter Watkins—which react to that challenge by strengthening the sense of illusion, providing a simulation of the real that could offer a better picture of reality. Andrea Virginás (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania) shifted the focus from the present to the past and presented a paper on the ways in which cultural memory of past events can be "corrupted" and shaped by films. Drawing on examples as varied as *Belfast* (Kenneth Branagh, 2021) and *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996), she argued that the memory-work performed by a film is influenced by the apparatus of analog photography or film, electronic video, or digital photo and film at the disposal of the remembering community. To close the panel, Martin Knust (Linnæus University Växjö) offered an insightful overview of the technological and aesthetic dimensions of corruption and decay in film sound. With an emphasis on the process of restoration of a soundtrack, he focused on the different causes of degradation (from storage conditions to the degradation of the technology itself) in order to argue that, in technical terms, there is no place for authenticity or high fidelity in restoration



- 12 The way Hollywood deals with female bodies, deeming some as corrupt and corrupting the representation of others, was at stake in Panel 8, "Gender and Corruption". Marianne Kac-Vergne (Université de Picardie-Jules Verne, Amiens) opened the panel with a focus on the representation of aging heroines in action films, through the example of Sarah Connor's character in the *Terminator* saga. Linda Hamilton's comeback at 63 in the latest opus *Dark Fate* (Tim Miller, 2019) was presented as an almost unprecedented exception of a female action hero reappearing after a long absence, as opposed to the many male action stars that kept playing physical parts until 60 and over. Hamilton's presence and part seem to stand out because of the non-thematization of her old age, which keeps her from appearing as the "pathologized other" conceptualized by Josephine Dolan. Nevertheless, aging women still convey some stereotypes, stressing an everlasting gap between the representation of aging male and female bodies – Kac-Vergne thus described this return as an epitome for Hollywood's inability to show the corruption of age on women outside the trope of the tragic figure of the bitter old woman. This kind of censorship of transgressive female figures already seemed to be present in Pre-Code era films, according to Anne-Marie Paquet-Deyris' (Université Paris-Nanterre) study of fallen women on screen at that time. Although the restrictions of the pre-Code were looser than they would then become, the politics of trespassing epitomized by such a film as Clarence Brown's *A Free Soul* (1931) was actually trading on male desires, giving men the agency and key role. Paquet-Deyris eventually questioned the marketing-driven dimension of what seemed at first to be a bold form of moral transgression.
- 13 The representation of cinematic monsters and the way they can stand for an ever-corrupt filmic form was, interestingly enough, a common feature of the talks of Panel 9, "Corruption and Genre". Amira McGivney (Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3) opened the panel with a case study of Robert Eggers's folk horror film *The VVitch*, released in 2015, seeking to analyze where the roots of corruption lie in this contemporary approach to witchcraft. Focusing on the fanatic vision of the world displayed by Eggers's work, the presentation emphasized the representation of a decaying Eden that keeps pervading the postlapsarian world. The focus was then placed on the status of the female protagonist of the film, who, although she keeps being ostracized as a corrupt agent of the Apocalypse, also allows the renewal of the figure of the Final Girl. McGivney ended up depicting the entire film as a near-nightmarish vision, fueled by corrupting wilderness and an inescapable materialization of the repressed. Witches then made way for vampires in Thierry Cormier's talk, centered on the idea of alternative film history and exploitation and the corruption of the way cinema can be diffused. Starting from the representation of the dawn of the medium in Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, Cormier drew a parallel between vampirism and the filmic art itself, feeding on both clean and damaged images. The intervention put forth the echo box aspect of the film industry, which keeps revising and corrupting its own images with a more or less moral purpose. This ever-changing and omnipresent dimension, according to Cormier, is not harmless: the cinematic frame might eventually absorb the whole world, deleting the possibility of the off-screen and its alternative narratives.
- 14 Panel 10, "Places of Corruption," put together papers that revisited places, both literally and metaphorically, associated with ideas of purity and corruption. Jean - François Baillon (Bordeaux Montaigne University) addressed the representation of

Venice as a decadent, corrupted city in Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973). Pointing at the different aesthetic and thematic ways in which corruption is featured in the film, he analyzed the protagonist's trajectory as both an impossible fight against the corruption of images and a failed attempt to resist the forces of corruption and decadence embodied by Venice as a city. Hadrien Fontanaud (Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3) examined the ambiguous use of the English rural landscape, often associated to ideas of purity, in *Penda's Fen* (Alan Clarke, 1974). Situating the film as a corrupt hybrid between the traditions of the coming-of-age narrative and folk horror, he argued that *Penda's Fen* celebrates the diversity and multiplicity of English culture and thus shows the potential of corruption as a revitalizing force in both the film's plot and aesthetics. Finally, Andrés Buesa (Universidad de Zaragoza) addressed the child figure as a site where ideas of corruption and purity are negotiated. Through an analysis of Chloé Zhao's *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* (2015), he explored the ways in which cinematic children can be the subjects of social-realist films without corrupting their suffering in a solipsistic experience for viewers, looking at both the possibilities and limitations of such an approach.

- 15 The representation of corruption in film, as well as the corruption of representation, and the way political institutions can interfere with filmic creation both on and off-screen, pervaded the studies offered in Panel 11, entitled "Political/Economic Corruption". Zeenat Saleh (Université de Franche-Comté, Besançon) opened the panel with a study of the intimate connection between the government institutions and the filmic and media images, through the example of Barry Levinson's 1997 satire *Wag the Dog*. Drawing from the contemporary perspective of high-speed information and social media(ted) news, the talk then looked back to the transformation of anchor women and anchormen into celebrities, endowed with a new authority and pseudo-neutrality, free to corrupt the truth *ad libitum*. Levinson's film, focused on the manipulation of the presidential image by the Hollywood know-how, is therefore both a reminder of the close connection between the capital of political power and that of entertainment, and the fabricated aspect of the presidential image. Beyond this fictional example, documentary images also appeared as the unofficial most powerful weapon of the US government in Zachary Baqué's (Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès) study of the HUAC's documentary *Operation Abolition*. Baqué indeed shed light on the way this very popular 1960 film attempted to manipulate the audience against any form of anti-institutional protest through very specific cinematic tools such as voice-over and addresses to the public. The talk also recalled the possibility and existence of counter-discourses, analyzing the ideological effect of *Autopsy on Operation Abolition* and *Operation Correction*, two 1961 documentaries made in reaction to the HUAC's film less than a year after its initial release. The rationalization of images as political weapons was also at the core of Nadine Asmar's (Université de Bretagne Occidentale) closure talk, built on a comparative study of police corruption in Egyptian and US cinema. Putting forth Third Cinema and a typology of political cinema from pedagogic, civic films to more activist instances, Asmar drew upon Emmanuel Barot's vision of politics as object to question the different modes of criticism and denunciation. In that regard, her talk studied the points of contact existing between these 3<sup>rd</sup> cinema works and American films such as Sidney Lumet's 1973 *Serpico*, in which dialogs and orality are commonly used so as to spread the most audible message possible. Asmar eventually questioned the efficiency and relevance of the criticism of specific times when received years later, and the way contemporary politics can benefit from earlier forms of corruption criticism.

- 16 Although it was a dimension present with previous speakers, panel 12 ("Corruption and Genre [3]") was fully focused on the links between film aesthetics and corruption. Nicole Cloarec (Université de Rennes 1) reflected on the corrupting power of genre movies in two case studies, *Berberian Sound Studio* (Peter Strickland, 2012) and *Censor* (Prano Bailey-Bond, 2021). While the films deal thematically with the corrupting experience of watching horror films, Cloarec instead focused on their aesthetics (the use of extreme close-ups, cutting on action, lack of sound, extreme zoom-outs, images of decay) to argue that they work to undermine the sense of realism attributed to film as a medium. Céline Murillo's (Université Sorbonne Paris Nord) talk explored cinema's potential for an uncorrupted representation of violence through the example of *G-Man* (Beth B., Scott B., 1978). In opposition to cinema's overall tendency to render violence spectacular, she argued that by corrupting aesthetics (manipulating archival footage, overusing of graphic matches, lacking narrative structure), the film forces spectators to face the violence displayed on screen and question it.
- 17 The 27<sup>th</sup> SERCIA conference offered a rich, multilayered view of the omnipresence of corruption in cinema, whether it be thematically, aesthetically or historically. This was made possible by a broad variety of approaches, with panels intertwining studies of cinematic genres, body representations, topology, gender, sociopolitical institutions, film and media industries, as well as *corpuses* that spanned throughout all of film history, juxtaposing pre-Code Hollywood with recent blockbusters or experimental video. The representation of political, economic and societal corruption was of course at the core of many talks, paving the way for a focus on the actors of corruption and often including an accurate analysis of the statuses of agent and victim in cases of corruption. Through this study of corruption on screen, emphasis was laid on the capacity of the topic to transcend genre and mode boundaries and pervade each image, from film noir to Italian westerns, not to forget more or less recent science fiction blockbusters and experimental films. If these could appear as images of corruption, they were also approached as corrupt images, thus shedding light on the way corruption affects the filmic matter itself and questioning the possibility of cinematic purity. Corruption was, on many occasions, standing for the way places of power can pervade places of creation and representation and use the image as a leverage of persuasion, manipulation and even coercion. Nevertheless, a more optimistic view of corruption was also the basis of several talks, in which the destructive energies of corruption were transcended, allowing for a glimpse of its seductive power, but also its productive, recreative force. As a result, the conference as a whole offered a powerful view of the way images can be received as they grow increasingly omnipresent and omnipotent. Allowing room for both worried, playful and iconoclast perspectives, the event displayed a strong awareness of the ambiguities of potentially corrupt cinema, as well as a sensitivity to the potentialities of corruption for past, present and future cinema.

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## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** corruption, cinéma, dégradation, crise, politique, pureté, body-horror, genre, réalité, matérialité, numérique, pellicule, Hollywood, esthétique filmique, hybridité, industrie, distribution, télévision, médias, matière, âge, subversion, rapports genrés, gouvernement, argent, mort, transformation, contamination

**Keywords:** corruption, cinema, degradation, crisis, politics, purity, body horror, genre, reality, materiality, digital, Hollywood, film aesthetics, hybridity, industry, distribution, TV, media, film, matter, age, gender, subversion, government, money, death, transformation, contagion

**Subjects:** Film

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